

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-14 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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SS-20 USIA-15 AID-20 COME-00 EB-11 FRB-02 TRSE-00

XMB-07 OPIC-12 CIEP-02 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01 INT-08

FEA-02 NIC-01 DRC-01 SCI-06 EA-11 ACDA-19 IGA-02

AGR-20 /261 W

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R 180905Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 432

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

US LIAISON OFFICE PEKING 5

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USUN NEW YORK 290

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECION 1 OF 4 COLOMBO 0189

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CE

SUBJ: IMPRESSIONS OF SRI LANKA CURRENT POLITICS AND  
FOREIGN POLICIES

1. SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE SUMS UP MY PERSONAL IMPRESSION OF  
SRI LANKA'S INTERNAL POLITICS AND FOREIGN RELATIONS, AS SEEN IN  
PERSPECTIVE OF MY FIRST YEAR IN COLOMBO.

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2. PM BANDRANIKE MAINTAINS UNDISPUTED LEADERSHIP SRI LANKA'S

PRESENT GOVERNMENT DESPITE SHARP RIVALRIES WITHIN HER UNITED  
FRONT COALITION AND SUSTAINED ECONOMIC CRISIS. HER GOVERNMENT,

HOWEVER, DOES NOT RETAIN CONFIDENCE OF COUNTRY AND I BELIEVE WOULD BE PROBABLY DEFEATED IF ELECTION WERE HELD TOMORROW. GOVERNMENT'S UNPOPULARITY STEMS PRIMARILY FROM ITS FAILURE FULFILL 1970 ELECTION PROMISES AND FACT IT HAS BEEN REQUIRED CUT BACK SHARPLY ON FOOD AND SOCIAL WELFARE SUBSIDIES. HOWEVER, OPPOSITION, WHILE ATTEMPTING EXPLOIT WIDESPREAD DISCONTENT WITH VIEW FORCING ELECTIONS PRIOR TO 1977, HAS BEEN UNABLE BUILD EFFECTIVE ANTI-GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN AND PRESENT PROSPECT IS FOR GOVERNMENT TO HOLD POWER UNTIL AT LEAST 1975.

3. DESPITE CONTINUED MARXIST RHETORIC, GSL ECONOMIC POLICY DURING PAST YEAR APPEARS TO HAVE MOVED SLIGHTLY TOWARD CENTER. UNTIL ENERGY CRISIS STRUCK ISLAND, I FELT THERE WAS SOME HOPE THAT GOVERNMENT'S FOOD PRODUCTION DRIVE WOULD SUCCEED AND

THAT DEPTH OF ECONOMIC CRISIS MIGHT HAVE PASSED. NOW, HOWEVER, UNLESS RELIEF OBTAINED FROM RECENT OIL PRICE INCREASES, SHORT-TERM ECONOMIC PROSPECTS REMAIN DARK.

4. SRI LANKA NO LONGER PURSUES ACTIVE OR DYNAMIC FOREIGN POLICY BECAUSE COUNTRY CANNOT AFFORD ACTIVIST POLICY, APRIL

71 INSURGENCY DIVERTED ITS ATTENTION TO INTERNAL PROBLEMS, AND NON-ALIGNMENT IN ASIA LACKS PREVIOUS POTENCY. MANY OF GSL'S FOREIGN POLICIES ARE GEARED TO OBTAINING EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE TO CLOSE FOREIGN EXCHANGE GAP. WHILE GSL CONTINUES STRONGLY SUPPORT NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT, FAILURE OF ARAB COUNTRIES TO PROVIDE CONCESSIONAL PRICES FOR OIL HAS CREATED DISILLUSION.

5. SHARP PRC-USSR COMPETITION EXISTS ON ISLAND WHERE PRC HAS BRIGHTEST IMAGE OF ANY EXTERNAL POWER BUT DOES NOT POSE DIRECT THREAT TO INTEGRITY BANDARANAIKE GOVERNMENT. INDIANS, LIKE SOVIETS, ARE CONCERNED ABOUT CHINESE INFLUENCE BUT INDIA HAS PLAYED RESTRAINED ROLE DURING PAST YEAR.

6. ALTHOUGH GSL CONTINUES PROMOTE INDIAN OCEAN ZONE OF PEACE AT UN, IT HAS ADOPTED MODERATE STANCE REGARDING RECENT US CONFIDENTIAL

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NAVAL TASK FORCE VISIT TO INDIAN OCEAN. US-SRI LANKA RELATIONS ARE GOOD AND I THINK THEY SHOULD REMAIN GOOD AS LONG AS US POLICIES DO NOT CONFLICT WITH IMMEDIATE CEYLONESE INTERESTS AND PROVIDED USG CAN CONTINUE SUPPLY APPROPRIATE SHARE OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. END SUMMARY.

7. DURING MY CONSULTATION IN WASHINGTON LAST MONTH, I PASSED ON SOME PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF CURRENT POLITICAL SCENE IN SRI LANKA AND GSL'S FOREIGN POLICIES, AS VIEWED IN PERSPECTIVE OF MY FIRST YEAR IN COLOMBO. FOLLOWING IS SUMMARY OF THESE IMPRESSIONS WHICH HOPEFULLY WILL BE OF SOME VALUE TO SRI LANKA WATCHERS AS 1974 BEGINS.

8. BANDARANAIKE GOVERNMENT TODAY. CEYLONSE POLITICS HAS OFTEN HAD CERTAIN ALICE-IN-WONDERLAND CHARACTERISTICS AND THIS REMAINS TRUE TODAY. THIS IS NOT TO SUGGEST MADAM BANDARANAIKE SHOULD BE COMPARED WITH ALICE BUT RATHER THAT POLITICAL LIFE ON THIS ISLAND CONTINUES TO BE SOURCE OF WONDERMENT, BOTH TO PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS, AS THEY WATCH INTERPLAY BETWEEN SIX POLITICAL PARTIES, TWO DISTINCE AND MUTUALLY DISTRUSTFUL ETHNIC COMMUNITIES, AND FOUR RELIGIOUS GROUPS, ALL INTERLARDDED WITH INTRICATE AND POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT FAMILY AND CASTE RELATIONSHIPS.

9. ON TOP OF THIS COMPLEX POLITICAL, ETHNIC, AND FAMILY-CASTE MIXTURE IS 56 YEAR OLD PM BANDARANAIKE, WHO, DESPITE HER OUTWARD CHARM AND AFFABILITY, IS SHREWD, HIGHLY PRAGMATIC POLITICIAN, VINDICTIVE AND SKILLFUL MANIPULATOR. FIFTEEN CABINET MEMBERS OF HER SOCIALISTIC SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) SPAN IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM AND IN ADDITION SHE HAS TO COPE WITH THREE AGING CABINET MEMBERS REPRESENTING TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMASAMA PARTY (LSSP) AND ONE SELF STYLED "HONEST COMMUNIST" WHO REPRESENTS FACTION OF RECENTLY DIVIDED COMMUNIST PARTY MOSCOW (CP/M). REMARKABLE FACT ABOUT CABINET IS THAT THIS POLITICALLY DISPARATE GROUP HAS REMAINED INTACT SINCE UNITED FRONT CAME TO POWER ALMOST FOUR YEARS AGO DESPITE INTERNAL RIVALRIES, APRIL 71 INSURGENCY, AND SUSTAINED ECONOMIC DISTRESS.

10. NUMERICALLY, RIGHTISTS AND CENTRISTS CONTINUE TO OUT-NUMBER LEFTISTS IN THREE PARTY GOVERNING COALITION BUT IN TERMS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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INTELLIGENCE, ABILITY, AND POLITICAL SKILL, ADVANTAGE STILL LIES WITH LEFTISTS. MRS. B MAY POSSESS CAPABILITY TO OUST LEFTISTS FROM CABINET BUT SHE HAS CHOSEN NOT TO DO SO, POSSIBLY IN BELIEF RIGHTISTS, WITH THEIR POWER ENHANCED, WOULD TURN AGAINST BANDARANAIKE FAMILY. SHE MAY ALSO FEAR THAT OUSTED LSSP AND CP/M LEADERS AND TRADE UNIONS AFFILIATED WITH THEM WOULD CAUSE MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR HER GOVERNMENT, WHICH THUS FAR HAS ESCAPED SERIOUS LABOR AGITATION. THEREFORE, RATHER THAN RISK SHARP CONFRONTATION WITH EITHER RIGHT OR LEFT, SHE HAS FELT CONSTRAINED TO PLAY DEFT BALANCING GAME, SHIFTING HER POLITICAL WEIGHT AND INFLUENCE AS REQUIRED TO COUNTERACT ATTEMPTS BY AMBITIOUS UNITED FRONT MEMBERS TO THREATEN HER PRIMACY OR TO PROMOTE POLICIES SHE DISLIKES. ALTHOUGH UNABLE EXERT STRONG AND COHERENT POLICY DIRECTION, SHE HAS DEMONSTRATED REMARKABLE FINESSE IN HER BALANCING EFFORTS. TODAY, THERE IS NO ONE WHO SERIOUSLY CHALLENGES HER LEADERSHIP. VAN HOLLEN

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**To:** STATE INFO NEW DELHI  
ISLAMABAD  
DACCA  
KABUL  
TEHRAN  
US LIAISON OFFICE PEKING  
MOSCOW

LONDON  
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